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Abstract

Investigates the tangled textual history of Radagast, a much-neglected character, and what it says about Tolkien's writing technique and care in making revisions. Investigates changes in his function between *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, and why and how he disappears from the later story.

Additional Keywords

Tolkien, J.R.R.—Characters—Radagast; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Technique; Tolkien, J.R.R. *The Lord of the Rings*—Relation to *The Hobbit*

THE ENIGMA OF RADAGAST: REVISION, MELODRAMA, AND DEPTH

NICHOLAS BIRNS

Where Does Radagast Come From?

THE *LORD OF THE RINGS* is set in Middle-earth, but is not coextensive with it. There is much in Middle-Earth that is barely explored in the text of *The Lord of the Rings*. What Tolkien called “the vast backcloths” (Carpenter 90) of his vision have many elements that are not brought to the immediate surface of his major work. As Anderson Rearick puts it, to subject every element of Middle-earth to critical scrutiny would be “both exhausting and inconclusive” (864). But the building-blocks of Middle-earth references remote from the main plot give us a sense of the intricately designed, panoramic backdrop which is so characteristic of Tolkien’s design. Sometimes Tolkien’s deployment of these references can give us valuable clues to pivotal decisions Tolkien made in conceiving his work. The wizard Radagast the Brown plays a minor role in *The Lord of the Rings*. His only plot function is to, unwittingly, decoy Gandalf into being taken captive by Saruman. He is not mentioned in the text after Book II, chapter 3. But Radagast’s role takes on a telling consequence with respect to how Tolkien thought about *The Lord of the Rings* while he was writing it—and afterwards.

Tolkien (*Letters* 135) forewarned Allen and Unwin, when delivering them the manuscript of *The Lord of the Rings*, that the manuscript was not a sequel to *The Hobbit* but to *The Silmarillion*. T. A. Shippey and others have problematized this opposition (cf. Shippey 79 on how both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* do not “quite take off” until their protagonists leave Rivendell), pointing to the many similarities between *The Hobbit* and its gargantuan successor. But the difference, foregrounded by Tolkien himself, still stands. Radagast the Brown is a tangible proof of this difference, as, somewhat surprisingly, he ends up so clearly being on the *Hobbit* side of the divide. Radagast appears in *The Hobbit*, as Gandalf’s ‘cousin’ (*Hobbit* [H] 7:118; a conception that is not close to being in line with eventual conceptions of the Istari in *The Lord of the Rings*). He is a colleague, a peer of Gandalf. Radagast thus stands as an element ready-to-hand for use in *The Lord of the Rings* the way many of the other characters in *The Hobbit* with their specific associations, geographical and otherwise, with the Quest of Erebor, do not. In *The Hobbit*, Gandalf actually leans on Radagast’s (local) reputation to get himself, and his dwarvish and hobbit charges, accepted by Beorn. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Radagast plays a key, intermediary role in communications between

Gandalf and Saruman. Yet Radagast *disappears* from *The Lord of the Rings* after the Council of Elrond. Searchers from Rivendell travel to his “old home” at Rhosgobel, but Radagast is “not there” (*LotR* II:3 267). In all the wrappings-up that occur at the end of *The Lord of the Rings* his case is not solved. Nor is it addressed in any of the Appendices.

The most obvious explanation of what happened to Radagast is that Radagast is fallen, that he had (*Unfinished Tales* [UT] 390) become “enamored” of the birds and beasts of Middle-earth to the extent that he had forgotten his mission among its people. This is implied in the poem quoted in the essay on the Istari (UT 395) which states that “only one returned” to Valinor of the original five, this obviously being Gandalf. On this reading, Radagast would be no more eligible for returning to Valinor than Saruman. Yet this would tug at credibility, as it would mean that Radagast was already fallen by the Council of Elrond. What would be implied here is not a decisive lapse, or even a Sarumanesque lust for power. Radagast’s lapse is a slow surrendering of any larger concerns to Radagast’s immediate task of tending to birds and beasts. But this is hardly visible in *The Lord of the Rings*. Radagast warns Gandalf of the Nazgûl. Vincent Ferré points out that Radagast is the first Wizard, at least in the *histoire* of the events of *The Lord of the Rings*, to call the Nazgûl for what they are, even if tardily (Ferré 189). Also, Radagast has already been established in *The Hobbit* as someone interested in humans, not just animals. Beorn knows and respects him; to Beorn, Radagast is more famous than Gandalf. Yes, Beorn is a shape-changer. But, as Tolkien emphasizes (*Letters* 178) he is a man. So Radagast, at least for the balance of his career as an Istar, has not isolated himself entirely from men and other sentient beings.

But there is an alternative explanation of the moral fate of Radagast the Brown, or, as Rose Zimbardo winningly calls him, “Radagast the Russet” (69). Is Radagast’s corruption indeed symbolized, if not effected, in his one moment of stage action in *The Lord of the Rings*? Radagast’s conveyance of Saruman’s message to Gandalf, done in “good faith” (Gandalf’s words; *LotR* II:2 255) ended up being a splitting of the difference, an attempt to maintain a precarious neutrality. This difference splitting is problematic in a fictive cosmos that is, at least at the highest levels, melodramatically divided. Equivocation is not a feasible alternative, once the split between Gandalf and Saruman has become clear. This is perhaps why Tolkien calls Radagast “a person of much less power and wisdom” (UT 394).

Yet nothing negative is ever said about Radagast. He is not denounced, by Gandalf or any others of the Wise. Indeed, the only negative words about Radagast are uttered by Saruman, (“Radagast the Bird-tamer! Radagast the Simple! Radagast the Fool!” (*LotR* II:2 252, also UT 394). The essay on the Istari in *Unfinished Tales* indicates that this animosity goes back to Valinor when the

animal-loving Aiwendil (Radagast) was forced upon the unwilling Curumo (Saruman) by Yavanna (*UT* 393). The implications of this are obvious. Curumo, associated, like Sauron before him, with Aulë, the maker, is contrasted with Aiwendil, ward of Yavanna, the guardian of nature and trees.

This is especially so given that the mentions of Radagast in the (post-*LotR*) essay on the Istari have a kind of suturing effect. Much like the situation occurring after the *Hobbit* was completed and *The Lord of the Rings* was beginning to be written, Tolkien has Radagast ready-to-hand as a subject for the essay on the Istari. But no development of his character is undertaken there; far less than Gandalf and Saruman receive in the same essay. The main goal in the Istari essay is to make sure that the account of Radagast that is on the record in *The Lord of the Rings* does not get too out of line with the higher conception Tolkien eventually had of the Istari in the post-*Lord of the Rings* period. The later Tolkien, indeed, almost seems embarrassed by Radagast. The essay on the Istari tells us much more about Gandalf, and even Saruman, but all it lets us know about Radagast are his Quenya name, his ties to Yavanna, and the early origins of Saruman's hatred of him.

It is striking how underutilized Radagast is in *The Lord of the Rings*. For consistency's sake, Tolkien would presumably want to incorporate as much of *The Hobbit* into its successor as possible. In many cases, Tolkien does just this. Certainly the presence of Gimli, and the entire Balin/Moria episode, as far darker as it is than anything in *The Hobbit*, provides continuity with the earlier book. We know the Dwarves, and we also know of the Beornings and of Dale, about whom Gloin makes sure to keep us apprised at Rivendell. Indeed, Gloin's information about these peoples (*LotR* II:1 222) is as much to reassure us, the reader, that we are in the same world as that of *The Hobbit* than it is to provide any intelligence useful to the dilemma of what to do with the Ring. Radagast also, to a degree, serves this reassuring function. Yet we are told, briefly, what happened to Dale in March 3019. There is no further word of Radagast.

Radagast also could have been used to flesh out the entire idea of the Istari. From the way characters speak of wizards as an entire class of people, one assumes that there are a reasonable number of wizards wandering around in Middle-earth. In fact, this sense of wizards as a class suggests that Tolkien at first expected to have more wizards in *The Lord of the Rings*, but then decided as a principle of narrative economy that too many wizards would be bad (and also make it into a more *Dungeons & Dragons*, or *Harry Potter*-esque, story). Tolkien thus forebore from putting further wizards in what Verlyn Flieger terms his

“mythos” (Flieger, “Review” 440).¹ There are of course (we later find out in *The Silmarillion*) many Maia, but few of them are ‘activated’ as Wizards, able to work harm or good in Middle-earth. Indeed, in the Middle-earth of the late Third Age, not only are just three wizards extant, but very few people can have met all three. (Does Théoden know of Radagast? Does Denethor?) One of the interesting readerly exercises to perform when analyzing naturalistic novels is to sketch out which characters have, in either present or implied past action, met each other. *The Lord of the Rings*, for all its fantastic setting, is naturalistic enough in its vast weft, in its surfeit of detail, for this exercise to be useful in the case of Radagast.

Treebeard is one who speaks of wizards as a class of beings. Yet he is on record as having met precisely two wizards, Gandalf and Saruman. Why not Radagast? Treebeard has largely confined himself to his own land, but Radagast plausibly could have wandered down the Anduin and rambled into Fangorn Forest. Yet there is no record of Treebeard meeting Radagast. In fact, there is no record of *anyone* having met all three wizards. Perhaps some in Rivendell have, as, when Gandalf gives due credit to Radagast’s mastery of the lore of birds and beasts of the field, he does so in such a way that assumes a familiarity on the part of at least some of his audience with Radagast.

Radagast’s odd lack of notoriety makes him a slight anomaly in Middle-earth. Fortifying this anomalous nature are the unusual ramifications of his name, both in its status in Middle-earth and in its actual origins. Radagast, which (see *UT* 390, 401) Tolkien variously termed an Adûnaic or low-Mannish name also lacks the familiar Sindarin epithet by which so much of Middle-earth knows Gandalf, and indeed Saruman. Radagast has his original Quenya name and his Mannish name, but no intermediate Grey-elven one, indicating rank and recognition among the wise of Middle-earth. Ruth S. Noel says that the origins of the name ‘Radagast’ lie in ‘Radigost,’ a pre-Christian Slavic deity. Noel describes Radigost as “the Slavonic god of bliss, good counsel, and honor, associated with the Roman god Mercury and the Greek god Hermes” (Noel 188). If Noel’s assertion is correct, Radagast is one of the really rare Slavic names in a legendarium whose names, derived from, or inspired by, European languages, recall Germanic, Romantic, and Altaic tongues, but rarely Slavic ones.² We are

¹ Similarly, L. Frank Baum has only one (good) Wizard—albeit a rather famous one—in his Oz series. Perhaps Tolkien and Baum shared a visceral association of too many wizards with magic run amok.

² With respect to Tolkien’s meager relationship to Slavic tradition, Olga Markova makes clear in her account of the attempt of Soviet-era Russian translators to render *The Lord of the Rings* into Russian in a way minimally acceptable to Soviet censors, that the Russian fairy-tale tradition, despite its temporal kinship with some of Tolkien’s other sources, was, in spirit, particularly far from that of Tolkien’s legendarium. Tolkien’s women have been

familiar with Tolkien's love of Finnish, Welsh, and Gothic. In his letters, Tolkien also speaks highly of Latin (see *Letters* 419) and Spanish, which influenced his early language, Naffarin. But Slavic languages are hardly in the philological spotlight for Tolkien.³

The question of "where did Radagast come from?," Tolkien's sources for the name and character of Radagast, may seem a textual one, the issue of "where did Radagast go?" a narrative question. Yet part of the narrative anomaly of Radagast has to do with the slightly more complicated case of the source of his name as compared to the other non-Quenya or Sindarin names in the tales.⁴ The sources of Tolkien's names and motifs, in their plurality and historical implication, are part of the accumulation of detail that makes up the grand design of Middle-earth. The first reviews of *The Fellowship of the Ring* compared it to Spenser and Ariosto (*Letters* 181). Both Renaissance writers resemble Tolkien in having an equal complexity in their synchronic design and in their diachronic references, overt or covert, to the sources of the stories they tell. And much of the complex design of Radagast's narrative fate has to do with Tolkien's relation to another source text—his own earlier work: *The Hobbit* and the earliest drafts of *The Lord of the Rings*.

Where Does Radagast Go?

To see what Radagast means to *The Lord of the Rings*, we first have to fully appreciate just how marginal he is to it. No sooner does he appear on stage than his role seems to be determinedly minimized. Radagast does not seem to be widely known in Middle-earth. If Radagast is an "ἄγγελος" (see *Letters* 202) his message does not get out widely. Gandalf describes Radagast as "never a traveller" (*LotR* II:2 250), but even so Radagast seems to have made strikingly little impact in nearly two thousand years in Middle-earth.⁵ Even Gandalf has not seen Radagast for "many a year" (*LotR* II:2 250). Radagast does not know of the Shire, or, apparently, of Hobbits, despite having some of the Hobbitish closeness to rustic nature.

likened to valkyries (see Donovan), but rarely to rusalkas, Goldberry of course being an exception.

³ The Noldorin etymology of "Rhosgobel," at *Treason* 173, involving the stem "RUSKA," also seems rather close to Rus/Russian as a word.

⁴ Shippey (225) cites Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* as possibly yielding a name-model for Radagast in "Radagaisus," the Gothic leader defeated by the "barbarian" Imperial generalissimo Stilicho in 405 AD.

⁵ Interestingly, in both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* we only hear about Radagast through Gandalf.

The key to the Radagast enigma may well lie in Treebeard's almost casual praise of Gandalf as "the only wizard that really cares about trees" (*LotR* III:4 455). In contrast to the tree-killing Saruman, Treebeard's praise of Gandalf is obvious. But what about Radagast? Is he not *the* rustic wizard? Does he not care about trees? Again, recuperative explanations could be proposed. Radagast could only be interested in animals, not plants. But this is rebutted at *Treason* 132, where Radagast is said to have "much lore [...] of herb" (cf. also *LotR* II:2 251). Strictly circumstantial factors cannot account for Radagast's disappearance. A more compelling explanation is to say that Radagast was eliminated by the revision process, *The Lord of the Rings's* re-conception as the closing cycle of stories of Middle-earth's history. In other words, the solution to Radagast's fate is to be found textually, not historically; in process, rather than its product. The more Tolkien revised *The Lord of the Rings*, the less use he had for Radagast.⁶

This can be seen most visibly in the role of eagles in *The Lord of the Rings*. When the eagle Gwaihir first rescues Gandalf he is clearly doing so as Radagast's emissary. Indeed, Gandalf has, unwittingly, saved himself (*LotR* II:2 251) in getting Radagast to send Gwaihir. The very fiction of Gandalf and Saruman's continued amity, their continuing to present a common front, is what sways Radagast to relay Saruman's message to Gandalf. Yet it also makes him think that Gandalf, in asking for news from birds, is in alignment with Saruman. The fiction of a common front has ensnared Gandalf. But it also saves him. Radagast's trust in Saruman betrays Gandalf, landing him in captivity. But Gandalf also trusts Saruman, as he advises Radagast to have the birds bring news to Saruman and Gandalf (II:2 251) thinking that the two will still be on the same side. This trust, working through Radagast (II:2 255), leads to nothing but good even though the object of trust betrays it. Indeed, amid all the crowded canvas of *The Lord of the Rings*, the Gandalf/Radagast/Saruman interchange is like a taut, three-man drama, where the viewer is supplied with continual revelations as to who knows what.

In this three-wizard tableau, Gwaihir the Eagle seems an emissary, an adjutant, of Radagast. Yet, when Gwaihir next appears, when he bears the reincarnated but still weak Gandalf to his healing in Lórien (*LotR* III:5 491), he is hardly an emissary of Radagast. Gwaihir's master now, inconceivably higher in the ranks of the Immortals, is clearly Manwë, the Elder King. Indeed, by the time he rescues Frodo and Sam from Mount Doom Gwaihir himself, a bird, is a kind of auxiliary Vala, a more exalted figure than the Radagast whose Quenya name, Aiwendil, indicates his friendship with birds. That Gwaihir replaces Radagast can be seen at *Shadow* 297 where, at least on one possible reading, Radagast is

⁶ See Shippey: "Tolkien is no longer trying to explain old inconsistencies from *The Hobbit*, but writing ever deeper into a world with a life of its own" (89).

mentioned as a potential emissary of the Ring if, as some Elves wishes, it is carried to the Havens. Radagast is inferentially seen as a figure in some way 'in touch' with Valinor here. But it is *Gwaihir* who takes up this function as *The Lord of the Rings* proceeds.

Radagast's eclipse can only be fully understood against the backdrop of Tolkien's geographical elaboration of Middle-earth as he wrote and revised his manuscript. The world of *The Hobbit* and the world of *The Lord of the Rings* are very different. As Shippey's classic observation shows, the most immediate difference between the two works has to do with "maps and names" (Shippey 73) of which the earlier work has few, the later, many. Certainly, the difference is not that the memory of the Elder Days is absent in *The Hobbit*. As the early reference to Gondolin in *The Hobbit* indicates, they are very much present even in the earlier, simpler book. When Thorin picks up the sword Orcrist and Gandalf his sword Glamdring (*H* 3:62) they inherit a succoring continuity with the Elven warriors of the past.

But the First Age, the history recorded in the already existent *Silmarillion*, is the *only* history in *The Hobbit*. There is no intermediate history. And the *intermediate* history is what *The Lord of the Rings* provides. We are told about the Second and Third Ages of Middle-earth, the history (and the very names) of the Shire, of Elendil and Isildur, of Gondor, of Rohan, the entire conception (of course, previously existent in Tolkien's legendarium) of Númenor. Denethor and Théoden do not know Radagast, on a narrative level, because the two kings are in the *deeper* part of *The Lord of the Rings*, and Radagast in the more *shallow*. Radagast is in the *Hobbit* part. Denethor, as his very name indicates, in the *Silmarillion* part. But even Théoden, in spite of his residual knowledge of hobbits and his rustic manners, is a figure who psychologically is closer to the world of *The Silmarillion* than that of *The Hobbit*. And, in Tolkien's compositional process, the way to the world of *The Silmarillion* is not through time—again, old Gondolin was present in the past of *The Hobbit*—but through space. The direction to the *Silmarillion* in Tolkien's revised Middle-earth is *southward*.⁷

The new Southern countries, the countries of Tolkien's *revision* of his compositional plans, take the place of *The Hobbit*'s compositionally 'old' Northern climes. For instance, the Rohirrim are, in culture, lineage, and language, like the Beornings or the men of Dale. But their history, their importance is much greater, as is connoted, importantly, by the sense of wistfulness conveyed in the *ubi sunt* "Where now the horse and the rider?" passage in "The King of the Golden Hall" (*LotR* III:6 497). The same sense of Northern inconsequence is true of Radagast in

⁷ A very concrete example of this can be seen in the transference, in the process of composition and revision, of Dimrill Dale to the south as it becomes more consequential (see *Treason* 16).

apposition to Treebeard, the shepherd of Fangorn Forest, the eldest of the Ents. The Ents are created mortal beings, not immortals, unlike even the most rustic Maia. But Treebeard, like Radagast, is (we find out from *The Silmarillion*) under the patronage of Yavanna, not that of her image-making husband, Aulë, from whose tutelage both Sauron and Saruman fell. Saruman, in his animus against Radagast, seems to have never forgotten Yavanna's imposition of Aiwendil on him (mentioned by Tolkien in the post-*LotR* essay on the Istari, again to achieve a kind of suturing effect). Treebeard and Radagast are alike not only in being associated with the stewardship of nature, but in having an especially conflicted relation with Saruman, the epitome of mechanizing ruin. The Treebeard/Radagast complementarity is indicated by Tolkien's own speculation, at *Treason* 212, that Isengard is to be given to Radagast at the end of *The Lord of the Rings*. But when we see Treebeard first mooted (at *Treason* 411) as a tree-shepherd, we see Gandalf and Saruman mentioned, but no Radagast, despite Tolkien's consideration of various uses for Radagast in the unfolding Quest.

Treebeard thus echoes Radagast, without seeming to know him. Could it be that Tolkien conceived Radagast as a vehicle for principles that were important to him, but then rejected him as an inadequate vehicle for these principles? Certainly Tolkien's statement on the essay on the Istari that Radagast became too enamored of birds and beasts, to the occlusion of grand strategy or moral priority, does not mean that Tolkien requires nature to pick sides. Treebeard supplies proof of this when he says that he is, strictly speaking, on nobody's 'side' because nobody, even the good and wise of the West, are on his 'side' when it comes to caring for trees (*LotR* III:4 455). Importantly, Treebeard is not trying to take an untenable 'third position', or splitting the difference, as Radagast, at least momentarily, is trapped into doing.

Tolkien uses melodrama, a sense of stark distinctions between opposites, to distinguish, in a moral sense, between good and evil. But he also uses melodrama in a structural way, to draw distinctions between good and good, surface and depth. This is shown in the case of Radagast as compared to Treebeard. Radagast was a sprite, not a shepherd. He was a lover, not a tender of nature. The vision of nature proposed in Fangorn, of trees that are living things and have as much a right to be as any other element of the created cosmos, goes far deeper than Radagast could ever plumb.⁸ Radagast does not care about

⁸ As Tolkien advises in his Foreword to the Second Edition of *The Lord of the Rings*, applicability should not be confused with straight allegory (*LotR* Foreword xvii). In a way what the 'loss' of Radagast does, by eliminating a too-convenient middle term, is to create a kind of melodrama that has to do with depth rather than value, making this kind of annealing restoration impossible, even as it seems at first to eliminate a badly needed excluded middle. Recent essays (see Chism, Rearick, Hoiem) have tried to salvage a

nature the same way Treebeard does, he is not 'rooted' in nature the way Treebeard is, by virtue of the latter's very ontology.⁹ Tolkien, of course, would oppose a worship of nature in itself, as opposed to a vision of nature as part of a higher, created order.¹⁰ Yet, importantly, even if Radagast 'fell', it was because he was too 'enamored' of the birds and beasts in a trivial sense, not in an overly idolatrous one.

But *The Lord of the Rings* does not dismiss Radagast lightly. There is a strangely elegiac cast to the passage in which he disappears:

The hobbits had been nearly two months in the House of Elrond, and November had gone by with the last shreds of autumn, and December was passing, when the scouts began to return. Some had gone north beyond the springs of the Hoarwell into the Ettenmoors; and others had gone west, and with the help of Aragorn and the Rangers had searched the lands far down the Greyflood, as far as Tharbad, where the old North Road crossed the river by a ruined town. Many had gone east and south; and some of these had crossed the Mountains and entered Mirkwood, while others had climbed the pass at the source of the Gladden River, and had come down into Wilderland over the Gladden Fields and so at length had reached the old home of Radagast at Rhosgobel. Radagast was not there; and they had returned over the high pass that was the Dimrill Stair. The sons of Elrond, Elladan and Elrohir, were the last to return; they had made a great journey, passing down the Silverlode into a strange country, but of their errand they would not speak to any save to Elrond. (*LotR* II:3 267)

As *The Treason of Isengard* shows, the mentions of Radagast and Rhosgobel are late additions to this superb passage describing, to use Christopher Tolkien's phrase, "The Journeys of the Scouts." Rhosgobel is also mentioned in the map on p. 205 in *The Treason of Isengard*. But the fact that Tolkien introduced Radagast into this grave, dignified passage provides our keenest grasp of what happened to Radagast in the course of *The Lord of the Rings's* composition. There is nothing in the action at that moment that would seem to justify the passage's mournful quality. Of course, the Nine Walkers are

skeptical, liberal Tolkien from arguments that use him as a means of restoring a pre-relativistic atmosphere of moral certainty.

⁹ For the most comprehensive account of ecological themes in Tolkien, and one which, importantly, acknowledges conflict within Tolkien's own perspective, see Flieger, "Taking the Part of the Trees."

¹⁰ For a deep ecological viewpoint, see Devell and Sessions; for a vision of a Celtic ecological Christianity which might have evoked some support on the part of Tolkien, see Davies.

setting out in peril, and, for all they know, the chances for their safe return are slim. Frodo, in particular, knows he is going into, to quote his own words, “deadly peril” (*LotR* I:5 102) of many different kinds, moral as well as physical. Yet there is new energy; new purpose. Narsil is re-forged as Anduril, and, as is immediately said in the next paragraph, the Enemy is not overly visible. The “Journeys of the Scouts” gives readers their first real sense (especially if they have not looked at the maps in the back) of the scope, the scale, of Middle-earth: it is panoramic, with not just a topographical sweep but a sense of the sheer density and plurality of the world into which the Nine Walkers are about to fully plunge.

Why the sadness, the mournfulness? Even the country that the re-reader of the passage knows is Lórien is referred to somewhat ominously, and throughout the melodic recitation of places, there is a sense of loss. A key here perhaps is the mention of Tharbad as ‘a ruined town.’ Tharbad is a place that, due to its key geographic position between Arnor and Gondor, should play a crucial role. As the southern outlier of the lands accessible from Rivendell, yet on the northwestern fringes of Gondor, it could be a key connector between the two halves of the West of Middle-earth. Yet, like Radagast, Tharbad disappears by the time of the final confrontation. Also like Radagast, Tharbad, or its location, plays a preliminary role with respect to the upcoming War of the Ring, as when Saruman (*UT* 346) or Wormtongue (*UT* 340) gives direction to the Shire to the Witch-King, they mention Tharbad. Both Tharbad and Radagast have a manipulative role cast for them by Saruman in the double game he is playing.

In terms of the compositional economy of *The Lord of the Rings*, one of the reasons that Tharbad *has* to be ruined by the time the events proper of *The Lord of the Rings* begins is because Tharbad is right on the road from Bree to Minas Tirith. This may be convenient for travelers in peacetime. But the narrative, for reasons of depth and excitement, must take a more circuitous detour. Similarly, Radagast as a representative of nature, a kind of genial, rustic sprite, is too easy a way for the narrative of *The Lord of the Rings* to go once we are out of the residual *Hobbit*-like world of Book One. Radagast and Tharbad, even though one is in the *Hobbit* and the other is not, are both well-paved roads in the narrative that must be sacrificed for the less-trodden ways that go by Caradhras and Fangorn. In other words, the action grows more consequential as it goes south, and it must go jaggedly south, not southward over smooth carriage roads that can constitute a direct, intermediate linkage between the *Hobbit* world and the *Silmarillion* world.

It is no coincidence that Tolkien first named Tharbad and Rhosgobel at the same point in the compositional process (see *Treason* 164). If, in an internal version of what Shippey (15) calls “asterisk-reality,” the action of the *Hobbit* had gone south, Tharbad might have featured, as a kind of southern Esgaroth. The

setting of the ruination of Tharbad during the great floods of 2912 that follow the Fell Winter, twenty-nine years before the action of *The Hobbit*, eliminates this potential spillover, and this must have been semi-deliberate on the part of Tolkien. In fact, the notable aspect of the destruction of Tharbad is not so much that it occurs before the action of *The Lord of the Rings* but that it occurs before the action of *The Hobbit*. Tharbad's existence somewhere on the map in the earlier book would have introduced too much of a 'business as usual' feeling in a world that it was in Tolkien's narrative and thematic interest to show was becoming ever more unstable. Similarly, though Radagast owes his very textual existence to the *Hobbit*, his removal, in a sense, has already begun, for Rhosgobel, his home, may, too, have been already destroyed.

Note that Rhosgobel is Radagast's *old* home. He has not been there for years, apparently, and the sentence implies that Rhosgobel had been a permanent residence, almost like Isengard (and Saruman is castigated for presuming to arrogate himself the permanent base of Isengard, unlike the humble, itinerant Gandalf). But, whatever Rhosgobel was, then something had happened. Radagast, though (my own admittedly extrapolative reading) occasionally bivouacking at Rhosgobel, had become an itinerant, allying him more with the good, Gandalf way of being a wizard. But when did Rhosgobel become Radagast's *old* home, not merely his home?

We will never know. This mystery makes the entire figure of Radagast such a riddle. Tolkien seems to have found Radagast too trivial a riddle to matter in the larger depths of his reconceived, epic, and (in the highest sense) melodramatic Middle-earth. Radagast and Tharbad at once matter and do not matter. They are minute details in the vast canvas of Middle-Earth. Concentrating on their precise role too much would distort the picture. Yet it is such details as these upon which the appealing specificity of Tolkien's intricately drawn world depends. Shippey implies this point when he terms both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* "primarily works of mediation" (169). Mediation between levels of time and significance can only occur through detail, and the detail, even if in literary sense mattering only *en masse*, takes on a significance in a way imputed to it by the significance of the overall canvas. So it is that even indeterminate enigmas tempt the reader with the allure of determinate solutions, and I want to venture such a speculation here. Could Rhosgobel, like Tharbad, have been destroyed in 2911/12? Gandalf speaks of Radagast as living "near the Southern borders of Mirkwood" (*H* 7:129). Is this the same place as Rhosgobel, which seems to be on the *western* borders of Mirkwood, as the Old Forest Road runs in the north of Mirkwood and the Old Ford and the Carrock are at its western edge? (In TA 2941, of course, southern Mirkwood would have been a dangerous place because of the proximity of Dol Guldur). Whether the Southern location of Radagast is a serious datum or something which needed revision when

considered in the context of the later trilogy but which escaped Tolkien's attention, there is no definite implication in *The Hobbit* of a fixed place for Radagast's abode. Only in the name-heavy *The Lord of the Rings* is there Rhosgobel.

As we recall, Gandalf tells the Council of Elrond he has not seen Radagast for "many a year" (*LotR* II:2 250). Radagast also has "many friends of old" (II:2 255; emphasis is mine) in Mirkwood, implying that Radagast has not been there recently. Perhaps the last time Gandalf saw Radagast before their meeting in TA 3018 was before Rhosgobel was destroyed? Could Tolkien have wanted to make sure that the intermediate sites of Radagast and Tharbad were safe 'behind' the action of *The Hobbit*, in the immediate prehistory of his late Third Age action, so that they could not present a sense of ongoing routine not appropriate to a world in such grave danger as the world of *The Lord of the Rings*? By the time we are reintroduced to Radagast in *The Lord of the Rings*, he is, as a meaningful character, stillborn, outdated in Tolkien's reanimated vision of Middle-earth. Tolkien speaks of the returned Gandalf having "the awe and terrible powers of the Ring-wraiths, only on the good side" (*Treason* 422). It is just this sense of awe which Radagast lacks. Once Tolkien's tale reaches for this level of awe Radagast has to disappear. Yet, crucially, Tolkien does not excise Radagast from the work entirely. He remains as part of the vast background of the tale.

It is striking how many of these Radagast-like details have to do with being in-between extremes. Tharbad is in Minhiriath, which means "between the rivers." Minhiriath's neighbor is Enedwaith, the "Middlemarch" (*Treason* 439) of Middle-earth. Both these regions, explicitly containing the element of the intermediate in their very names, are, like Radagast, given little attention in the trilogy. (Also like Radagast, they receive more ample treatment in *Unfinished Tales*.) In the ultimate conception of *The Lord of the Rings*, these intermediate details suffer from at once being too intermediate and too much on the straight road which the text wants to circumvent. Tolkien has chosen a harder, less straightforward road, which makes intermediate phenomena such as Radagast and Tharbad into extraneous details which work, at its heart, does not require. But there is a regret at the dismissal of the extraneous detail as well. This regret is a corollary of what Shippey calls the sense "that the author knew more than he was telling, that behind his immediate story there was a coherent, consistent, deeply fascinating world of which he had no time [...] to speak" (Shippey 171). As Tolkien's grim tale of endurance and sacrifice unfolds, we are redirected away from the intermediate wizardly shallowness of Radagast. Radagast disappears from *The Lord of the Rings*. But his fate in Middle-earth remains to be speculated on by the inquisitive reader. Thus the detail of Radagast, expended in Tolkien's revision process, simultaneously adds depth to the entire tableau.

The poignancy of the transcended detail contributes to the unusual mixture of hope and fear in the "Journeys of the Scouts" passage. The elegiac tone of the passage in which Radagast disappears and Tharbad is seen as ruined does not stem merely from any pent-up anxiety preceding the Quest of the Nine Walkers. The elegy is for a kind of storytelling that is now gone from a reconceived Middle-earth, for a light-hearted tale of adventure now turned into a somber legend of loss.

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